

## Air service between Nigeria and Jamaica now a reality

The long-awaited air travel between Jamaica and Africa is now a reality. According to a press release from the Nigerian High Commission, the governments of both countries have recently signed a bilateral agreement to facilitate direct air service from Jamaica to Nigeria at a cheaper cost and at a shorter time, as well as to eliminate visa requirements.

"This is to inform the General Public that the Governments of Jamaica and Nigeria have initiated a Bilateral Air Services Agreement (BASA) which will facilitate direct air link between both countries," the press release stated.

This is the culmination of a process started some time ago which was highlighted by the Nigerian Ambassador to Jamaica, Peter Oyedele, during an address to members of the Rotary Club of Spanish Town in February of this year. As reported in this newspaper on March 3rd, on that occasion, Ambassador Oyedele predicted that travel connection between his country and Jamaica could become a reality by the middle of this year. "It is hoped that within the next couple of months, interested airlines will begin to lift passengers direct from Kingston to what many Jamaicans call, the 'motherland' at a cheaper cost and a shorter and more comfortable travel time," the release further stated. What that means is that the route is now opened for it to be exploited by the airlines as the ball is now in their court, said Oyedele in a telephone interview with Sunday Finance "All the airlines will be so informed by both governments for them to decide. For the route is now free for them to exploit," he said. Just as he pointed out at the Rotary meeting, the press release also highlighted the mutual advantages to accrue from this landmark development in the relations between Nigeria and Jamaica which formally started with the opening of the Nigeria High Commission in Kingston in 1973. It noted also that the Jamaica High Commission was opened in Nigeria in the 1990s and remained the only Jamaican Diplomatic Mission in Africa until a few years ago. "The establishment of direct air connection between Jamaica and Nigeria will open the African and Middle Eastern countries to Jamaica and also enable Nigerians to have direct contact with their kith and kin not only in Jamaica but in the entire Caribbean Region. "Among other benefits will be the promotion of trade and investment between the two countries. Since the route will be shorter than the existing one which is through third countries, there will be reduced cost and elimination of visa through third countries. We shall also be witnessing student and cultural exchanges between citizens of both countries. The Jamaican Tourism Industry will in addition be expected to witness a boost as more Nigerians will be exposed to the beautiful holiday facilities in Jamaica. "The initiating of BASA is also significant as it coincides with the plans of the Jamaican Government to celebrate the United Nations Declaration of the Year 2011 as the International Year for People of African Descent, (IYAD). "It is hoped that within the next couple of months, interested airlines will begin to lift passengers direct from Kingston to what many Jamaicans call, the 'motherland' at a cheaper cost and a shorter and more comfortable travel time."